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# "THE HONORABLE ORDER OF FLAPPERS": A HISTORICAL DISCUSSION ON DEFINING *THE FLAPPER*

## HISTORY HONORS THESIS

Submitted to the Providence College Department of History

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Date May 1, 2013

# "The Honorable Order of Flappers": A Historical Discussion on Defining THE FLAPPER

**Carolyn DeDeo**

**HIS 490 History Honors Thesis**

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**Fall 2012**

This thesis is dedicated to the strong women in my life, especially Janice DeDeo, Jennifer DeDeo, Marianne DeDeo, Georgiana Kirchmeier, Alexandra Van Buren, Jennifer Anello, Hannah Howroyd, Shannon Mason, Megan Quann, Nicole Sadoski, Julia Turner, Annie Wendel, and Samantha Wood. Furthermore, it is dedicated with eternal gratitude and love to Patrick and Janice DeDeo and with respect and special thanks to Dr. Jeffery Johnson.

## CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

The Greek pantheon has a particular relevance to America in the 1920s—driven by a lightning bolt wielding Zeus, industry and urban life flourished with the large scale introduction of electricity; Zeus's jealous wife Hera wielded a power of her own as women gained suffrage with the Nineteenth Amendment; automobiles and telephones connected the country with the speed of the fleet footed Hermes; despite Prohibition, Dionysus orchestrated what became a seemingly endless bacchanalian romp.

In the most famous of Greek myths, three goddesses fell into a dispute over which of them was the most beautiful: the politically powerful Hera, the seductive Aphrodite, and the cold and clever Athena. The epics of Homer—the times' greatest poet—stem from this myth. Homer and his stories have come to represent an age (the Homeric Age) in a similar way that F. Scott Fitzgerald and his stories have come to represent the 1920s. Fitzgerald is credited with dubbing the 1920s "the Jazz Age."[1] Besides this similar nomenclature (significant because it shows the propensity for fiction authors to understand an era as a whole), the mythological system of the Homeric Age and the illusion of the Jazz Age have further, more substantive parallels.

The impetus of the story of the Trojan War is a struggle between mythological women to determine their place in their Olympian society—when taken to Paris, the question of beauty became a political battle. Underlying F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels and the society they represent is a similar struggle. The goddess "types" (political, beautiful,

[1] From his collection of short stories "Tales of the Jazz Age" (1922).

and cerebral; and even married, free-loving, and virgin) were in contention within the composition of the 1920 female type as well: THE FLAPPER.

THE FLAPPER was both a fictionalization and an actualization. If this seems confusing and contradictory, it is because it *is* contradictory and confusing. THE FLAPPER was modern, and she therefore embodied many inconsistencies that plague the modern era, specifically continuing tradition and breaking with it, developing a dependence on materialism and asserting independence, and establishing an individual identity through conformity. The mythologizing agents who defined THE FLAPPER are familiar to the modern world: the film industry with the inherent ability to manipulate reality and present it as credible and the advertising industry that also distorts the distinction between desire and attainability.[2] Intimately tied to film of the period, and arguably more influential than it, was literature—particularly the literature of F. Scott Fitzgerald.[3] Thus, the primary sources for understanding THE FLAPPER are a confusion of fiction and reality.

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[2] Joshua Zeitz refers to the enormously influential advertising industry as the "merchants of cool." In describing their influence on the flapper, he says "But if the flapper faithfully represented millions of young women in the Jazz Age, she was also a character type, fully contrived by the nation's first 'merchants of cool.' These artists, advertisers, writers, designers, film starlets, and media gurus fashioned her sense of style, her taste in clothing and music, the brand of cigarettes she smoked, and the kind of liquor she drank—even the shape of her body and the placement of her curves. Their power over the nation's increasingly centralized print and motion picture media, and their mastery of new developments in group psychology and the behavioral sciences, lent them unusual sway over millions of young women who were eager to assert their autonomy but still looked to cultural authorities for cues about consumption and body image. Like so many successor movements in the twentieth century, the flapper phenomenon emphasized individuality even as it expressed itself in conformity." Joshua Zeitz, *Flappers: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 9.

[3] Donald Meyer, *Sex and Power: The Rise of Women in America, Russia, Sweden, and Italy* (Middleton, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 626. Meyer

Just because THE FLAPPER is difficult to define does not mean she is impossible to define. Furthermore, just because she is ensconced in myth does not mean that she does not have highly significant historical and intellectual implications. Some of the most fundamental characteristics of modern culture are revealed through the examination of THE FLAPPER. In the groundbreaking book *When They Severed Earth From Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth*, Elizabeth Wayland Barber and Paul T. Barber argue that myths have an extreme importance in society and are encoded with truths.[4] By applying their theory to understanding THE FLAPPER's modern myth, THE FLAPPER will be analyzed in a way that fits her into a serious historical and intellectual conversation. It is necessary to peel away the layers of gimmick, myth, and advertising like so much cosmetic paint in order to understand the important gender revolution behind THE FLAPPER.

In defining THE FLAPPER, we are answering the question "Who is THE FLAPPER?" In answering this question, a two-fold examination will take place: the first approach will be to answer the question "Who is the flapper?" and to define her as a type—to examine the characteristics of the real American women who were part of the turn of the century movement. The second is to answer the question "Who is The Flapper?" and to chose an individual as the representative of American Flappers.

Prince William of Sweden gave a typically shallow definition of a flapper to a *New York Times* special correspondent in 1927: "A flapper is a young girl, intelligent and

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writes, "As the art of words, literature remained in far more reliable touch with history [in comparison to the Jazz Age cinema]."

[4] Elizabeth Wayland Barber and Paul T. Barber, *When They Severed Earth from Sky: How the Human Mind Shapes Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

good looking. She has bobbed hair and wears short skirts, smokes cigarettes and dances the Charleston and Black Bottom."[5] While these things are true, the superficiality of the definition implies a simplicity in THE FLAPPER's nature that is absent in reality. A better understanding of THE FLAPPER is as a modern woman whose importance lies in her elimination of a gender-partitioned society and whose seriousness lies in her ability to have fun. To a modern audience, the radicalism of these notions is easily underestimated. But in the context of the beginning of the twentieth century, the modernism of THE FLAPPER was astonishing. This assertion is true of both "the flapper" and "The Flapper," Zelda Fitzgerald.[6]

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[5] "PRINCE DEFINES FLAPPER: William of Sweden Also Describes Himself as a 'Hard-Boiled Egg'" *The New York Times*, 20 January 1927.

[6] This paper's purpose is not biographical. For the foundational biography on Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, see *Zelda: A Biography* by Nancy Milford. This is the primary source I used. *Invented Lives: Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* by James R. Mellow discusses the lives of both Fitzgeralds. Finally, for the most recent biography, see Sally Cline's *Zelda Fitzgerald: The Tragic, Meticulously Researched Biography of the Jazz Age's High Priestess*. The objective of this paper is to use the life, writing, and cultural influences of Zelda Fitzgerald to understand the historical implications of the flapper movement and, conversely, to use the flapper movement in general to understand her, the exemplary individual of it.

## WHO IS "THE FLAPPER?"

### THE MYTH OF THE 1920s: The American Mount Olympus


The 1920s certainly seem like an era from a mythological past: dominated by giants, nourished on illicit nectar, illuminated by volts of lightening over an industrial

Elysian Fields. The years from 1918 to 1929 are propagated as a continuous party during which everyone was young, glamorous, wealthy, and scandalously and recklessly drunk. There must be some reason that the Jazz Age has this myth, as underlying myth is always a fundamental truth. In *How the Human Mind Shapes Myth*, Barber and Barber define myth as a system for passing on essential information through a didactic story form. Furthermore, they hold that the internal logic of a myth is true.[7] Sometimes, because of the Lethe Effect, these truths become lost and the myth becomes just an interesting story.[8] However, the 1920s were recent and this aspect of the Silence Principle is not entirely applicable—the truths within the 1920s' myth are still accessible.

THE FLAPPER on the cover of the 1927 August "Early Autumn Fashions and Fashions for Children" *Vogue* is likened to the goddess Persephone, a beautiful young girl whom Hades, Lord of the Underworld, kidnapped.[9] While in the underworld, she indulged her desire for illicit fruit by eating three pomegranate seeds. When her mother, Demeter, Goddess of the Harvest, learned of her daughter's kidnapping, she let all the plants die until Zeus, King of the Gods, forced Hades to return Persephone to her mother. However, since she had eaten the three seeds, every year she had to return to the netherworld to be the unwilling bride of Hades for three months. To the ancient Greeks, this was a logical explanation of autumn—when Demeter begins to prepare for the

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[7] Barber and Barber call the principle used to check the internal logic of a myth the Logic Cross-check: "*Investigating the logic of the actions of the participants serves as a useful cross-check that we have suitably separated their explanations from their observations.*" Barber and Barber, *How the Human Mind Shapes Myth,* 29.

[8] The Lethe Effect: "*What is never said may eventually be forgotten entirely.*" Barber and Barber, *How the Human Mind Shapes Myth,* 19.

[9] Georges Lepape, *Vogue Cover*, 15 August 1927.

absence of her daughter and neglects her botanical duties—and winter—when Demeter falls into despair.

For the *Vogue* cover artist, this was also an appropriate allusion for THE FLAPPER. The Persephone Flapper myth might run something like this: THE FLAPPER, a beautiful young girl, was carried away by the devil into the underground nightlife scene. There, she danced with men, drank alcohol, and indulged in all sorts of "unladylike" and illicit pleasures. Though her mother mourned the "loss" of her daughter, though every power on earth might have tried to return THE FLAPPER to her mother, her participation in the netherworld made her the Queen of the Underworld. Correlative with her reign, the earth falls into despair. However, as a goddess, THE FLAPPER remains forever beautiful and the only goddess allowed to enjoy herself in the netherworld.

Just as the Barbers break down myths by understanding the cultures from which they originate, so too the myth of the 1920s must be broken down. THE FLAPPER is the quintessence of her time—the "goddess" of the era, an effervescent character that gave a "damned good show" and then bowed off history's stage.[10] What differentiated the 1920s from both previous and later eras that gave it this epic quality?

This illusion of mythological grandeur has its place historically, as it was predominantly an illusion of a flourishing advertisement industry. Like all great marketing campaigns and all great illusions, it sold itself so well that people believed in

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[10] Part of the quote: "Alabama knew everything they said about her—there were so many boys who wanted to 'protect' her that she couldn't escape knowing… 'Thoroughbred!' she thought, 'meaning that I never let them down on the dramatic possibility of a scene—I give a damned good show.'" Zelda Fitzgerald, *Save me the Waltz* reprinted in Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, *Zelda: The Collected Writings*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (New York: Scribner, 1991), 32.

its ideals then just as fervently as they do now. America's business *was* business; it marketed itself as well as a whole as its citizens did individually.[11] THE FLAPPER grew up in a consumer economy that was convincing its participants that they needed *things*. Writes F. Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* (1922):

> [Myrtle cried,] I'm going to make a list of all the things I've got to get. A massage and a wave and a collar for the dog and one of those cute little ash trays where you touch a spring, and a wreath with a black silk bow for mother's grave that'll last all summer.[12]

The advertising and fashion industries jointly propagated the idea that to look like something was to be something. The film industry furthered this idea by regulating a certain type of female and standardizing an idea quickly and on a large geographical plane.

THE FLAPPER was a vital part of society everywhere. Concentrated in the big cities were "big" flappers like Louise Brooks in Hollywood and Zelda Fitzgerald in New York City. But flappers were not exclusively urban and they were not exclusively famous. Flappers could be found in suburbia just as easily as they could be in Chicago. Robert and Helen Lynd conducted one of the most important surveys of the young generation in Muncie, Indiana. In fact, according to the Joshua Zeitz, author of *A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern,* the

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[11] President Calvin Coolidge in 1925 said, "Afterall, the chief business of America is business." in his "Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington, D.C.," January 17, 1925. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project.* http://presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=24180.

[12] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby,* Edited by Matthew J. Bruccoli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 31.

flapper movement began in 1918 in Montgomery, Alabama, when Frances Scott Key Fitzgerald and Zelda Sayre met:

> —a tale of the fascinating characters who were present for America's rendezvous with modernity—begins in the most unlikely of places: at a small country club in the summer of 1918, where a young army officer is mustering up the courage to ask someone to dance.
>
> For all intents and purposes, and purely by virtue of chance, America's Jazz Age began in July 1918 on a warm and sultry evening in Montgomery, Alabama. There, at the Montgomery Country Club—"a rambling brown-shingled building," as one contemporary later remembered it, "discreetly screened from the public eye by an impenetrable hedge of mock oranges"—a strikingly beautiful woman named Zelda Sayre sauntered onto the clubhouse veranda.[13]

Zeitz's association of the Fitzgeralds with the flapper movement is neither original nor perceptive—it is observational. The Fitzgeralds *were* the movement. They were the chief mythmakers of their generation and were applauded as such. Dusted in gold, the Fitzgeralds basked in the hue they had inherited from their Gilded Age predecessors. As Dorothy Parker described upon seeing the couple for the first time: [The Fitzgeralds] did both look as though they had just stepped out of the sun; their youth was striking. *Everyone* wanted to meet him."[14] Nancy Milford records in her biography of Zelda (the first to be published):

> Within eight months [*This Side of Paradise*] had sold 33,000 copies, but its sales alone were not what counted; it was reviewed and talked about everywhere. Scott was suddenly "the arch type of what New York wanted." He wrote later, "I who knew less of New York than any reporter of six months' standing and less of its society than

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[13] Zeitz, *Flappers: A Madcap Story,* 13.

[14] Nancy Milford, *Zelda: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 67.

> any hall-room boy in a Ritz stag line, was pushed into the position not only of spokesman for the time but of the typical product of that same moment." And it was not Scott alone, but Zelda, too, who was caught up in the swirl of publicity, and not knowing what New York expected of them they "found it rather confusing," Scott wrote. "Within a few months after our embarkation on the Metropolitan venture we scarcely knew any more who we were and we hadn't a notion what we were."[15]

James R. Mellow, biographer of both Fitzgeralds in *Invented Lives: Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (1984), also recognizes the Fitzgerald's adeptness at casting themselves into parts: "...the ultimate fascination for me...was what masters of invention [the Fitzgeralds] became, creating new versions of themselves, putting themselves into their stories, acting out their stories in real life."[16] The Fitzgeralds' stories do not reflect their lives—their lives are just an extension of their stories in an altered genre. They had multiple personalities and were two great actors. Their skill in acting was also noted by their friends. Hadley, Hemingway's first wife, remembers the performance of the story of Zelda's affair with a French aviation pilot:

> It was one of their acts together. I remember Zelda's beautiful face becoming very, very solemn, and she would say how he had loved her and how hopeless it had been and then how he had committed suicide [not true]...Scott would stand next to her looking very pale and distressed and sharing every minute of it. Somehow it struck me as something that gave her status. I can still see both of them standing together telling me about the suicide of Zelda's lover. It created a peculiar effect.[17]

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[15] Ibid.

[16] James R. Mellow, *Invented Lives: F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), xx.

[17] Milford, *Zelda*, 114.

The great personalities of the times were at least to some extent fictionalized, and the great novels were to a similar degree real—the culture was exactly tempered to produce a mythological goddess. This goddess was both a product of her culture and the producer of her culture. The industries mentioned (entertainment, fashion, and advertising) established and catered to public tastes. Therefore, in examining the illusion of the 1920s, we should be able to determine the mechanisms truly driving the Roaring Twenties. For example, a remarkably successful advertising campaign of 1929 promoting "Torches of Freedom" (cigarettes) was designed to extend the product to an untapped market.[18] As of 1904, a woman could still be arrested for publically smoking in New York City. Thus, the campaign reveals: a recognition of changing concepts of femininity and female capabilities, the close association of identity or capability with a consumer product, the manipulation and cleverness of advertisers, and the new importance of women (the target demographic) in the economy. Though the connection between freedom and cigarettes might seem questionable to a modern audience, in a world where it was only proper for men to engage in an activity that was pure pleasure there was a *significant* connection between freedom and cigarettes. The New York woman arrested for enjoying a cigarette was penalized because she was enjoying a man's pastime. This is the great societal inequality that THE FLAPPER is responsible for addressing.

Thus, the final and most important aspect of the 1920 myth was the desire for hedonism. A hedonistic desire was not solely female; rather, it was generational. In an interview with *Shadowland Magazine*, F. Scott Fitzgerald told the reporter:

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[18] Zeitz, *Flappers: A Madcap Story*, 172.

> I am tired, too, of hearing that the war broke down the moral barriers of the younger generation. Indeed, except for leaving its touch of destruction here and there, I do not think the war left any real lasting effect. Why, it is almost forgotten right now.[19]

In a world more willing to pretend that the Great War and its subsequent instability did not exist than to cope with it, hedonism was the antidote of choice. But this form of hedonism was more than a Dionysian ritual—there were extremely significant social motivations behind and consequences of the materialism and frivolity of the 1920s. Everyone was creating and proving him or herself. THE FLAPPER, as a young woman and therefore with the most to gain, was foremost amongst them.

Finally, a technological revolution transformed turn of the century society and divided it decisively from the previous century. A technological revolution easily correlates into a magical atmosphere as sophisticated gears whiz and whirl. Improved manufacturing equipment mass-produced the magic of the new century, purchasable as ready-made clothes, foods, automobiles, and faux jewels and relatively cheap and accessible to Americans *en masse*. Glamour became cheap. The automobile, probably the most influential technological advance, was transformative in all aspects of society but, particularly, in the relationship between men and women:

> The triumph of the mass-produced automobile signaled the end of the Victorian era's courtship system. Just ask the father of a teenage girl in Muncie, Indiana, who vainly warned his daughter against "going out motoring for the evening with a young blade in a rakish car waiting at the curb." "What on earth *do* you want me to do?" the young

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[19] Frederick James Smith, "Fitzgerald, Flappers, and Fame" *Shadowland*, (3 January 1921) 39, 75. reprinted *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 7.

> woman replied with exasperation. "Just sit around home all evening!"[20]

THE FLAPPER was setting out for adventure *into* her world. She was no longer a woman content to be in the domestic sphere—she wanted to be worldly. Having established the composition of that world, it will become clearer, from the perspective of nearly 100 years after her creation, how and why she operated in it as she did. The 1920s were a time of myth only so far as they are believed to be.

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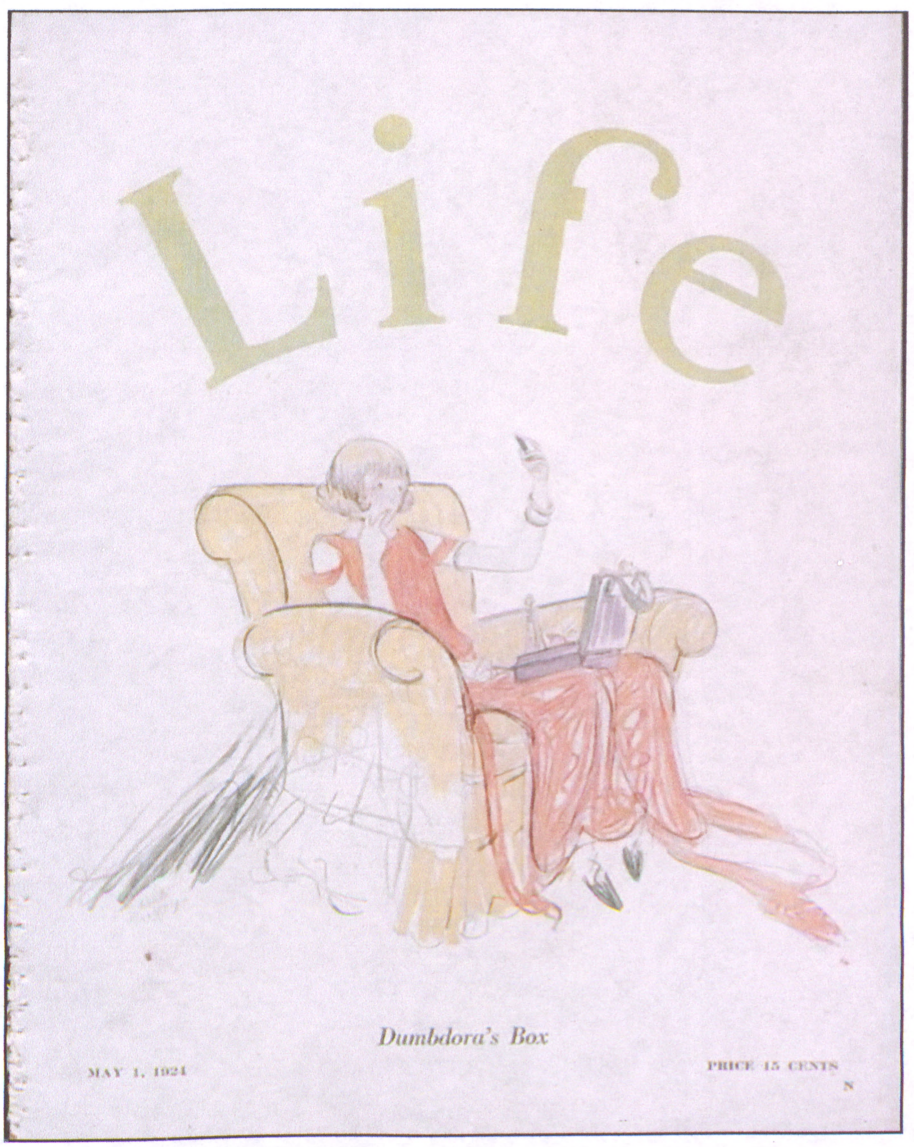
[20] Zeitz, *Flappers: A Madcap Story,* 34.

**THE FLAPPER: Defined**



THE FLAPPER was a historic individual—she was thousands of real American women participating in one of the most (if not the most) important gender revolutions in history. Because the flapper was so materialistic, she is often reduced to just a fashion trend. Feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman, author of *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), failed to see the importance of THE FLAPPER:

> They remain…the slaves of fashion…lifting their skirts, exhibiting their legs, powdering their noses…There is a splendid stir and push among our youth, what is called a 'revolt'..—but what have they to propose instead? So far there has not been put forth by all this revolted youth any social improvement that I have heard of.[21]

This reduction is inaccurate and insulting to the radical philosophy and influence of the flapper movement. Flappers were easily recognizable because they were united by a specific fashion trend. But behind the fashion of THE FLAPPER were principles of tremendous historical and cultural significance.

THE FLAPPER's most distinct contribution to fashion was a remodeling of the female body. With the help of a corset, THE FLAPPER's predecessor in fashion, the Gibson Girl, could emphasize her curves—and her feminine attractiveness—at the expense of crushing her internal organs, restricting her oxygen intake, and limiting her mobility. The corset applied, on average, 21 pounds of pressure (up to 88 pounds) and compressed the waist between two and a half and six inches.[22] The liberation of women from their whalebone prisons, compounded with the shortening of skirts and the introduction of practical shoes, had societal as well as aesthetic implications. When

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[21] Gilman qtd. in Meyer, *Sex and Power*, 347.

[22] Zeitz, *Flappers: A Madcap Story*, 138.

women gained mobility, they were able to function in the workplace. They were able to dance. They were able to participate in sports. The uncorsetted woman was healthier and freer—it only made sense that she was also happier. THE FLAPPER was a modern woman in virtues, actions, and form, as Dr. Thomas R. Thorburn of New York, told the Eastern Osteopathic Association:

> The much criticized flapper possesses a more nearly scientifically correct walk and posture than any other type which has been in vogue for ages. She has discarded the back-breaking and spine-deforming high heels, replacing them with a common sense shoe. She assumes a fairly correct posture when standing. No 'debutante slouch' appeals to her and her body is not forced into abnormal shapes by society form [*sic.*] corsets.
> The flapper is a happier girl because she fills her lungs with plenty of fresh air and unlike the girl with the 'slouch' her digestion is normal.[23]

When women reclaimed their bodies from their corsets, they took a polarized approach. Instead of accepting severely limited mobility, flappers were forced to adopt strict dietary and exercise regimes to whip their frames into the new flat-chested, hipless, athletically lean ideal.[24] While this introduced women to new forms of recreation and new job opportunities, it also caused a rise in unhealthy practices, like fad diets and eating disorders. According to the *New York Times* article "FLAPPER LINES OUST VENUS DE MILO PLAN" (1923):

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[23] Special to *The New York Times*, "SAYS VENUS DE MILO WAS NOT A FLAPPER—Osteopath Says She Was Neurasthenic, as Her Stomach Was Not in Proper Place," *The New York Times,* 29 April 1922.

[24] "Colleen [Moore's] regimen—to avoid 'too much white bread, potatoes, pastry, sweets, butter, oil, and fat' and to get 'at least an hour's exercise, vigorous enough to stimulate the circulation, and to cause deep inhalations of air.'" *Picture Show Magazine*, qtd. in Zeitz, *Flappers: A Madcap Story*, 264.

> The new Venus, whose proportions have been reduced by the athletic tendencies of the modern girl, now must be 5 feet 7 inches in height, a perfect 34, with 22 inch waist and 34 inch hips. The ankle should measure 8 inches and the weight not exceed 110 pounds.[25]

Zelda's scrapbook contains evidence that she exercised for personal and aesthetic reasons, and that she may have suffered from some weight issues as well: in a clipping from a local paper that she preserved in her scrapbook, she shaded the picture of her face, taken just after her daughter's birth, with a pencil in order to slim it.[26]

For Zelda, awareness of her body transcended a simple aesthetic ideal. Throughout treatment for her mental illness, Zelda and Scott preferred programs that had a physical component. The treatment adage of one of her physicians, Dr. Carroll, was: "*mens sana in corpore sano*—a healthy person in and through a healthy body."[27] Fitness in young women became an issue with the reimagining of the feminine form, with both positive and negative consequences.

Body issues serve as an example of the psychological facet of fashion. Fashion and physiognomy are also inherently linked and also reveal the psychology of fashion. Zelda applied rouge at an early age, a habit particularly scandalous in her time and used, for its full shock value, by the flapper movement. Previously the application of cosmetics was a ritual reserved for prostitutes and other women of questionable repute. The

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[25] "FLAPPER LINES OUST VENUS DE MILO PLAN: Fashion Expert Declares Woman of Today Must Conform to "Perfect Thirty-Four" *New York Times,* 16 April 1923.

[26] Zelda danced and swam from girl to adulthood. Milford, *Zelda,* 86.

[27] Dr. Adolf Meyer (in the preface to Dr. Carroll's book *The Grille Gate,* 1941) qtd. in Milford, *Zelda,* 310.

commonly held belief was that an unblemished complexion was the mark of an unblemished character.[28] Flappers did not assume virtuous airs and, therefore, delighted in painting their cheeks, ringing their eyes, and coating their lips. A heavily made-up face became associated with THE FLAPPER and enabled women to look younger for longer. The quest for eternal youth was a dangerous obsession with the 1920s and for Zelda specifically.[29]

The use of makeup for shock value reflects most of Zelda's other antics, for it had the deliberate intention of confirming and negating her society's physiognomic associations. An indication that makeup could be central to identity is the prominence of Gloria's rouge in *The Beautiful and Damned* (1921). Scott clearly saw makeup—or, generally, outward appearance—and identity as something so closely linked that rouge became an attribute instead of just a description. Zelda comments on it in her review of the novel: "What I was about to remark is that I would like to meet the lady. There seems to have been a certain rouge she used which had a quite remarkable effect."[30] By wearing makeup, Zelda assumed the outward appearance of a prostitute—which she was not—and also some of the sexual liberties associated with prostitution: makeup was both a rebellion against and assumption of her society's values. Flappers were playing a complicated gender game in the expression, both visually and actively, of their rejection of the double standard.

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[28] Zeitz, *Flappers*, 204.

[29] See Gerald Murphy's quote, page 25 of this paper.

[30] Zelda Fitzgerald, "Friend Husband's Latest," reprint *Zelda Fitzgerald—The collected Writings*, ed. Matthew J. Brucolli, (New York: Scribner, 1991), 388.

Thus, THE FLAPPER's fashion choice should be seen as a physical manifestation of her assumption of certain masculine traits (as in the case of cosmetics: sexual desire/expression). The female form was undeniably masculinized in this period: the feminine curves were streamlined in accordance with the male body and the hair was cut close to the head in a style that, by its very name, has masculine undertones: the "bob." According to the theory that superficial qualities indicated fundamental phenomenon, this clear gender ambiguity must be explored for its full significance. In this exploration, the true radicalism and importance of THE FLAPPER will be revealed.

Ultimately, THE FLAPPER is so difficult to define because she was a societal gender construct heavily grounded in materialism. The materialism of THE FLAPPER was more easily understood than her subversive gender statements, a fact that accounts for the belittled respect that is shown to this feminist type. While fashion was definitely part of the flapper identity, it was not the only component. Likewise, though fashion is by nature a superficial classification, it can incorporate profound societal, cultural, or theoretical constructs.

The balance between abstraction and materialism was difficult for THE FLAPPER's contemporaries to differentiate between, but from the comfort of nearly a century since her creation, it is clear that THE FLAPPER's radicalism and virtue lies in her elimination of a gender-partitioned society.[31] As a general type, American flappers assumed some

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[31] "She [the flapper] was distinctly real, the product of compelling social and political forces that converged in the years between the two world wars. Gainfully employed and earning her own keep, free from family and community surveillance, a participant in the burgeoning consumer culture that counseled indulgence and pleasure over restraint and asceticism, the New Woman of the 1920s boldly asserted her right to dance, drink, smoke, and date—to work, to own her own property, to live free of the strictures that governed her mother's generation." Zeitz, *Flappers*, 8.

important masculine traits that they reconstructed as part of their distinct female type. While the bob and flat-chested and hipless form made THE FLAPPER resemble a man, her actions proved a more substantial resemblance. Flappers featured prominently in the workforce, the consumer economy, places of entertainment, colleges, and in relationships. They were mobile, loud, public, and sexual—qualities formerly suited to the "male" sphere: "It's easy, in retrospect, to lose sight of just how radical THE FLAPPER appeared to her elders. Until World War I, few women other than prostitutes ventured into saloons and barrooms. As late as 1904, a woman had been arrested on Fifth Avenue in New York City for lighting up a cigarette."[32]

Bridging the gender gap did not originate with THE FLAPPER. The suffrage movement, just predating THE FLAPPER, demonstrates the idea that, as suffragist and abolitionist Sarah M. Grimké exalted, "Whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do."[33] Unlike the suffragist's emphasis on the "morally right," however, THE FLAPPER embraced the virtues *and vices* of masculine roles—she took up the mannerisms of men, entered their professions, adopted their values (challenging the double standards, especially in relationships), and participated in their forms of entertainment.

The two most significant areas of the masculine sphere that were heretofore inaccessible to women were professional fields and places of entertainment. Universities for women had been steadily rising—it is extremely significant that a synonym for

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[32] Zeitz, *Flappers*, 6.

[33] Sarah M. Grimké, "Letter XV: Mane Equally Guilty with Woman in the Fall" *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*. Eds. Linda K. Kerber, de Hart, and Dayton. Vol. 1. 7th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 236.

"flapper" was "collegiate." THE FLAPPER began, with pioneers like Lois Long (newspaper columnist), to enter professional occupations. Dorothy Dunbar Bromley understood this in her article for *Harper's Bazaar* entitled "Feminist—New Style" (one of the most important contemporary articles to take THE FLAPPER seriously), explaining:

> …she is not one of the many women who look upon their jobs as tolerable meal-tickets or as interesting pastimes to be dropped whenever they may wish. On the contrary, she takes great pride in becoming a vital factor in whatever enterprise she has chosen, and she therefore expects to work long hours when the occasion demands.[34]

Likewise, women invaded the world of entertainment. During the Roaring Twenties, actresses dominated the film industry, with Mary Pickford pioneering an executive, behind-the-scenes role as one of the co-founders of United Artists. It was not only the performers but the audience that was becoming feminized. Movie theatres, nightclubs, and speakeasies opened their doors to respectable women for the first time:

> Right into the 1890s, the scenes for social mingling of the sexes were restricted to, on the one hand, the great private mansions of Fifth Avenue and, on the other, the rough saloons and music halls of working-class appeal, where, in fact, the only mingling was between male patrons and female providers…By 1900 new kinds of acceptable public places where the two sexes could consort had begun to proliferate: hotels with many more public rooms, restaurants, cafés, night spots. For the first time the sexes could drink in public together, here and there smoke together…a new realm, neither that of work nor that of home, was being enhanced and enlarged…[35]

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[34] Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, "Feminist—New Style," *Harper's Magazine*, October 1927.

[35] Meyer, *Sex and Power*, 347.

In the article, "Feminist—New Style," Bromley makes an important contribution to feminist theory according to a workable, viable model. It presents a new type of feminism that is radical in that it does not distinguish between men and women fundamentally; the Feminist—New Style does not prefer women over men, but likes women *with* men:

> [The Feminist—New Style is] knows that it is her American, her twentieth-century birthright to emerge from a creature of instinct into a fullfledged individual who is capable of molding her own life. And in this respect she holds that she is becoming man's equal. *If this be treason, gentlemen, make the most of it* .[36]

The comingling of the sexes in the same sphere gave rise to a new system of interaction. Naturally, because women were redefining their relationship to men there was a correlative redefinition of the courtship system. Zelda and Scott's relationship is a prime example. Zelda recognized a changing gender notion in her relationship with men regarding what was acceptable and what was attractive. She was not ashamed to slip off her panties at dances and ask her date to keep them in his pocket. She did nothing to stifle the rumor that she swam naked—instead, she wore a skin-colored swimsuit to *propagate* the rumor. Likewise, once she started "dating" Scott, she made no effort to alter her "scandalous" ways.[37] Writing to Scott about her various other dates, she

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[36] Dorothy Dunbar Bromley, "Feminist—New Style," *Harper's Magazine*, October 1927, qtd. Charles J. Shindo, *1927 and the Rise of Modern America* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 54.

[37] "Dating" was a new idea in post-WWI society: "But the swift breakdown of the 'calling system' [of the Victorians] gave rise to a new romantic lexicon by the early 1910s. Now, boys and girls were going out on 'dates,' a term that appeared as early as 1896 in George Ade's columns for the *Chicago Record* but that most prewar writers continued to place safely between quotation marks so as to impart the experimental and faddish quality of the emerging system." Zeitz, *Flappers*, 35.

claimed: "Darling heart, I love you—truly…I must leave or my date (awful boob) will come before I can escape—Good Night Lover."[38] Scott, trying to evoke some of the jealousy he felt, tried telling her about another woman. However, Zelda replied, "Anyway, if she's good-looking, and you want to one bit—I know you could and love me just the same."[39]

While other women shared this sentiment, other women did not become the inspiration of F. Scott Fitzgerald's stories—*Zelda did.* Hence, Zelda's conduct during her courtship influenced more than just her suitor—it affected America as a whole, in that it influenced how the spokesman of his generation understood the most important figure in that generation: THE FLAPPER. How Scott portrayed THE FLAPPER is how history remembers her.[40] Scott's prose is informative on two levels: it informed 1920s society about the new standards of acceptableness, and it therefore informs historians about cultural presumptions of the 1920s. Like the Fitzgeralds themselves, it was a concoction of fiction and nonfiction.

The new standards of acceptableness that Zelda practiced and Scott wrote about comprised a sexual revolution. Zelda and her fellow flappers recognized a female sexuality, and, in doing so, they broke down a fundamental gender divide in marital relationships. For this reason, flappers acquired a hyper-sexualized reputation. Their sexuality contributed to their radicalism, but their ultimate desire to settle down and

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[38] Milford, *Zelda,* 47.

[39] Milford, *Zelda,* 48.

[40] "As the art of words, literature remained in far more reliable touch with history [in comparison to the Jazz Age cinema]." Donald Meyer, *Sex and Power*, 626.

marry tempered it. So while the romance of Zelda and Scott lasted about two years, they were eventually married on April 3, 1920. During their courtship, Zelda flaunted her sexuality both with Scott (Mellow believes that they had premarital sex, a radical move even though it was probably only with him) and with other boys, whom she accompanied to proms, dancehalls, and on other dates. Dorothy Parker remembered Scott claiming that "…he was going to marry the most beautiful girl in Alabama *and* Georgia!"[41] Zelda *was* the most sought after debutante—giving proof to her own assertions that "boys *do* dance most with the girls they kiss most" and "men *will* marry the girls they could kiss before they asked papa."[42]

Flappers did not reject traditional roles. In fact, women married younger in the 1920s (Zelda was 21 when she married Scott). However, within their traditional role, there were important nuanced alterations. The concept of marriage has not been stagnant throughout American history. In the 17th century, marriages were economic agreements, as women had fewer legal rights and limited capacities for self-sufficiency. The 18th century saw the rise of marriages of compassion and the development of Republican Motherhood. In the 20th century, the concept of marriage changed again, as the union of equals. Today, the issue of gay marriage is once again changing American society's concept of marriage.

Flapperism was about gender-sphere freedom; therefore, any gender role that a flapper chose to fill, she did so not as a duty but as a *choice*. Most women did choose

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[41] Milford qtd. Parker, *Zelda*, 67.

[42] Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, *Eulogy on the Flapper*, reprint *Zelda Fitzgerald—The collected Writings*, ed. Matthew J. Brucolli, (New York: Scribner, 1991), 391.

traditional roles: according to a poll of Vassar College girls taken in 1923, 90 percent of the girls would put marriage before a career. Though these graduates would be willing to give up their careers for marriage, between 1918 and 1928 the number of women in the workforce increased five-fold.[43] In this way, THE FLAPPER navigated the turbulent waters between convention and revolution.

With marriage flappers did not *necessarily* abandon their jobs and sexualities. Many, like Zelda, attempted to exercise both. Zelda's insistence that she could have affairs and still be committed to Scott was not necessarily unusual. According to an interview conducted by Judge Ben Lindsey in his book *The Companionate Marriage*, a woman who has an open marriage says:

> We love each other, but we enjoy these outside experiences; so why not take them? I think we care more for each on account of them…if he has an affair with a girl he takes a fancy to, it really means nothing more to him or me than if he took her to dinner or the theater. It is all casual and harmless unless one *thinks* harm into it.[44]

Zelda also made numerous attempts at a career of her own. She wrote and co-wrote with Scott a number of short stories for magazine publication. At age 27, she made the monumental decision to become a ballerina. Scribner publishing house published *Save Me the Waltz*, Zelda's semiautobiographical novel, in 1932. The same year, she also wrote the play *Scandalabra*. Zelda painted throughout her life and displayed her work in a gallery in 1935. After Scott's death she started work on a second novel, *Cesar's Things*, which was uncompleted upon her death in 1948.

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[43] Lucy Moore, *Anything Goes: A Biography of the Roaring Twenties*, (New York: The Overlook Press, 2010), 85.

[44] Shindo, *1927,* 63-64.

Zelda's desire for cheap thrills contrasted with her desire to do something substantial with her life. Hedonism and seriousness were in direct contention. In high school, Zelda completed a teacher's assignment to write a poem with a rhyme she composed on the spot:

> *I do love my Charlie so.*
> *It nearly drives me wild.*
> *I'm so glad that he's my beau*
> *And I'm his baby child!*[45]

But in her adult life, she turned out very serious short stories and a novel. This discrepancy between THE FLAPPER's objectives via the same medium—to shock with the poem and impress with the short stories and novel—is an example of how flappers could utilize frivolity for both personal enjoyment and cultural activism. Zelda's obsession with ballet and her literary output attest to her fundamental desire to be productive in her own right and not as Scott's perfect compliment or inspiration. While Zelda may have claimed to have been "a lazy woman," she was remarkably prolific.[46] Her friend Gerald Murphy recalled an afternoon he was invited to the studio to watch Zelda's ballet lesson:

> There was something dreadfully grotesque in her intensity—one could see the muscles individually stretch and pull; her legs looked muscular and ugly. It was really

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[45] Milford qtd. Zelda, *Zelda*, 12.

[46] Flappers in general should not be taken at face value. Though Zelda and flappers were careful to spew nonsensical statements like when Zelda described her perfect day (in the same interview that she described herself as "lazy") as "Peaches for breakfast. There, that's a good start, isn't it? Let me see. Then golf. Then a swim. Then just being lazy. Not eating or reading but being quiet and hearing pleasant sounds—rather a total vacuity. The evening? A large, brilliant gathering, I believe." Taking flappers at their word undermines their inherent complexity. "What a 'Flapper Novelist' Thinks of His Wife" *The Courier-Journal [Louisville]* (30 September 1923), 112, reprinted *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 47.

> terrible. One held one's breath until it was over. Thank God, she couldn't see what she looked like. When I watched Zelda that afternoon in Paris, I thought to myself, she's going to try to hold on to her youth. You know, there's nothing worse; it ruins a woman.[47]

Her artistic and literary productions align Zelda with the modern women whom, Bromley writes, "are moved by an inescapable inner compulsion to be individuals in their own right."[48]

The assertion of individuality and independence were paramount to THE FLAPPER's makeup. Being a flapper was not about being quiet—it was about making an important and multifaceted statement. Sometimes, as in the assertion of independence *through* dependence on men, in the claim to individuality *through* conformity with vogue fashion trends, and in acceptance of traditional roles *with* radically new understanding of them, these statements were plagued with inconsistencies. The newly reconstituted courtship system reflected all three of these inconsistencies.

Closely associated with women's newfound sexuality was the age-old use of it. Women may not have admitted to sexual desire before the flapper era, but they had been manipulating men's desire for them since Adam and Eve. In obtaining the necessary money to be a flapper, THE FLAPPER adopted some policies that undermined her goals. In seeking money, THE FLAPPER could turn businesswoman—like the Shifters—or turn flirt—like so many did.[49] By playing an age-old game of exchange of sexual favors for

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[47] Murphy qtd. in Milford, *Zelda*, 142.

[48] Bromley, "Feminist—New Style."

[49] Shifters were schoolgirl entrepreneurs selling "Shifter" badges for pocket money. The possession of a badge bought membership and the right to sell other badges. According to the article, some "Shifters" were making as much as $12 a week. It

monetary favors with men, they were able to acquire the necessary admission and look to appear in public and to appear independent. The glitz that went into achieving flapperiety was not necessarily cheap. According to a 1922 add in the New York *Evening World*, "The New Flapper Girl" could be "Dressed to the Minute for $11.26 (Less Than Regular Price of Coat Alone)."[50] The outfit included a coat—"Jaunty collegiate…Attractive loose-fitting model with mannish notched collar" ($7.77)—a hat—"The REAL Flapper Hat" ($1.00)—and shoes—"The Flapper Oxford" ($2.49). An approximate price equivalent in modern rates using the Consumer Price Index to convert the value of an $11.26 outfit from 1922 generates the "bargain" price of this outfit to be about $151.00.[51] Thus, a "petting" barter system developed through which flappers financed their looks and entertainments.

While THE FLAPPER could control her own actions in her relationships, she could not control her society at large. Despite her importance in the economy as an employee and consumer, she was not paid as much as her male workforce counterpart; hence, she

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eventually died out in popularity with the flapper, but was taken up by Wall Street. Says the article: "But in the meantime the shifters has expanded into Wall Street. A father or brother of a flapper heard of the game at home, and, ever on the look-out for a new sensation to rouse the financial district form the doldrums of dull days, introduced it among the brokers and their customers…the idea of getting a fellow to pay from $1 to $10 for a brass clip worth a fraction of a mill appealed alike to the office boy and the head of the firm…" in "SHIFTERS NO LONGER APPEAL TO FLAPPER: She Repudiates Organization Reputed to Promote Promiscuous Flirtations," *New York Times,* 26 March 1922.

[50] "'National's Outlet Store' Advertisement," *The Evening World,* New York, 27 March 1922, Pg. 21.

[51] Estimating using the Consumer Price Index to convert the value of an $11.26 outfit from 1922 generates the "bargain" price of about $151.00. Samuel H. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to present,"

had to scheme other ways to financially provide for her fashion statement. Therefore, flappers financially supplemented their income with their beaux, turning dating into a business. The way flappers did this, though plagued with inconsistencies in their bid for freedom and assertion of independence, expressed their strategic resourcefulness and business prowess. In styling herself according to the new standards of attractiveness, THE FLAPPER provided herself with a means to maintain her image. This system naturally favored beauty or charm, contributing to THE FLAPPER's shallow legacy. But it was THE FLAPPER who called the shots, and, to which Zelda and Scott's courtship testifies, women were more than capable of holding their own even to the most accomplished of suitors.

THE FLAPPER is important because not only did she break down gender partitions—but, more importantly, *she also had fun doing it.* Flappers understood that they had the same right to life liberty and *the pursuit of happiness*. They looked at their restricted place in society and asked, what about pleasure made its enjoyment masculine?

Thus, while hedonism characterized the young generation, it is only women's participation in pleasure for pleasure's sake that is truly revolutionary. Their quick adaptation to a lifestyle of fun serves as the necessary evidence to prove that their understanding of a woman's place in society was not relegated to the moral theoretical sphere and the domestic physical sphere. Flappers became instant disciples of modernism, recognizing that, in a modern world, happiness was inseparable from consumerism:

> The flapper was the feminine expression of the modern consumer who spent what she made, or in many cases spent more than she made with the extension of credit, with

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MeasuringWorth, http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare (accessed 9 November 2012).

> pleasure as the goal: pleasure in drinking and smoking, and pleasure in sex. This pursuit of pleasure reflected and reinforced America's transition from a producerist to consumerist economy. This economic shift developed alongside a cultural shift favoring personality over character. The Gibson Girl was a model of pure womanhood. She wore her long hair up and neat, and her tight-fitting corseted attire emphasized her curves and therefore her attractiveness to men yet left little flexibility for any work other than that of wife and mother. The ideal nineteenth-century woman was celebrated for her character, with the most valued traits being devotion, chastity, and selflessness. The ideal flapper, by contrast, was more valued for her personality, and especially for her spontaneity, style, and ability to have fun. And while economic changes account for a measure of this transformation in the characteristic feminine type, generational differences reinforced the transformation. As F. Scott Fitzgerald put it in 1927, "They are just girls, all sorts of girls, their one common trait being that they are young things with a splendid talent for living."[52]

The fact that THE FLAPPER incorporated frivolity into her routine, identity, and values should not undermine the significance of her as a type, but heighten her importance. That flappers adapted even the "unsavory" male traits (for no other observable purpose than pleasure) was revolutionary.[53] No American woman predating THE FLAPPER ever perfectly aligned with her society's conception of the "ideal woman" as the female ideals were consistently of such moral standards that they exempted essential human traits like sexuality and a proclivity towards vice. Flappers, however, embraced both of these traits.

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[52] Shindo, *1927 and the Rise of Modern America*, 55.

[53] The flapper was a participant in her society—she was not responsible for the morality of the society. She certainly did demonstrate her immorality, but the backlash she provoked as the Eve of 1920s' immorality is generally exaggerated. The flapper could be someone like Louise Brooks who unabashedly practiced free-love, but an uncorsetted college student could also be considered a flapper.

By instituting a radical new standard, THE FLAPPER earned herself a number of critics: "In the wide open spaces of New Jersey and Long Island there are now to be observed several new examples of the manner in which irresponsible youths seek to deride conservatism and attract the limelight, preferably of disapproval."[54] Her offense directly correlated to her willingness to step into a man's role: she was scolded because of the way she drove, swore, smoked, loved, cut her hair, showed her legs, played sports, worked outside the home, drank, partied, and walked. The flapper flaunted the fact that she was not only capable of all masculine vices but was also proud to possess them. She was a distinctly *human* version of a "female" stock type. Tired of being on the pedestal, she flapped down. The fact that some saw her as liberated and others as fallen did not concern her.

Flappers were not an organized movement, and for this reason they have been subjected to a harsh stereotype. No Flapper Manifesto was ever published comparable to the suffragette's "Declaration of Sentiments" and no National Flapper Chapter or other prominent committee formed to standardize the movement.[55] While flappers are generally described as young women, women as old as 62 identified with the flapper movement.[56] Though flappers are generally seen as exclusive to the first quarter of the

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[54] "Flapper Always Thinking Up Something New and Startling", *New York Times,* 7 June 1925.

[55] Plenty of writing on the flapper was published—the distinction being made here is that there was not a standardized conception of the flapper and her purpose that was articulated and adopted on a public level. This paper uses Zelda's "Eulogy on the Flapper" and references Bromley's "Feminist New Style" as two important documents in understanding the flapper.

[56] "PRINCE DEFINES FLAPPER: William of Sweden Also Describes Himself as a 'Hard-Boiled Egg'"; Edna Wallace Hopper's possible affair with the Duc de la Chatre

20th century, some people saw her prototype as always existing within society.[57] Neither economic class, profession, geography, nor race defined the flapper. In fact, the only empirical characteristic that every defined "flapper" had in common was her sex and a general fashion sense. Therefore, THE FLAPPER has been subjected to a looser and more interpretive categorization of qualities. Priests praised her honestly for emancipating her generation and mockingly for driving young men to ministry work.[58] Some reformers applauded her freedom-loving ways while other reformers condemned her as the vice of her generation.[59] Grandmothers excused her behavior claiming to have been flappers once themselves, while high school principals scolded first-years for conforming to a

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was described in an article "Edna Wallace Hopper, 'Eternal Flapper,' Sails, Considering Proposal to Wed Duke," *New York Times*, 12 June 1926.

[57] "Mother was a flapper, too, except that the modern appellation hadn't been imported from England in her day and the campus customs of twenty-five years ago didn't have the benefits of 1922 publicity methods." in "MOTHER WAS FLAPPER ONCE—And Oxford Dean Says Daughter Will be a Better Mother," *New York Times*, 26 February 1922.

[58] "MINISTER DEFENDS FLAPPER—The Rev. Almer Pennewell Predicts Fine Generation of Women," *New York Times*, 23 May 1922; "SAYS FLAPPER AIDS CHURCH—Evangelist Declares They Are Driving Young Men Into Ministry," *New York Times*, 2 September 1922.

[59] Miss Eleanor Adams of Oxford College for Women (Chicago) defends: "The modern girl has developed initiative. Her surplus energy expends itself in radical opinions, extreme dress and restlessness. She is a little puzzled about what to do with what she learns in college, but we are striving to train her, not so much for leadership as for service" in "MOTHER WAS FLAPPER ONCE—And Oxford Dean Says Daughter Will be a Better Mother," *New York Times*, 26 February 1922; "The flapper was a post-war creation. Her hair overnight resembled a Hotentot's; her skirts ended about her knees; she sneaked her brother's cigarettes and swore like a trooper. She chewed gum—great wads of it—vigorously and incessantly. Her make-up was as crude as a clown's. She was supposed to be 'neck artist,' 'booze hound' and 'human smokestack,'" as was originally printed in The Junior League Magazine (Chicago) but reprinted in "FLAPPER SUPERSEDED BY GIRL WITH POISE—Junior League Members Proclaim the Advent of a More Refined Era," *New York Times*, 15 February 1928.

radical movement in which they had no part.[60] THE FLAPPER was virtuous and vicious, modern and historical, clever and frivolous, dependent on men and independent of them; she was youthful innocence and scandal, a fashionista and an eyesore, a man-eater and a young wife, an emancipator of her generation and a horrible role model, a college student and a party girl, an individual and a conformist. In other words, she was a conglomerate of contradictory opinions that have consequently obfuscated her historical value.

As the *Life* magazine cover captioned "Dumbdora's Box" indicates, THE FLAPPER was subjected to a harsh stereotype.[61] Generally, stereotypes, whether they are racial, occupational, or some other societal classification, do not need their derisive and fictitious natures annotated as such in a historical discussion; however, THE FLAPPER stereotype does, as it is generally accepted and its demographic accordingly stripped of its merits and dismissed. Though THE FLAPPER may not have consciously considered the gravity of her choices and their impact and consequences in gender sphere elimination, reducing her to a "dumb" troublemaker *is* derisive and fictitious. It is important to keep in mind that however she was criticized in her own age, the seriousness of the fact that for perhaps the first time in American history the feminine ideal was imperfect must not be belittled.

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[60] Mrs. Mary Schultz claims "'I like what they call the 'flapper.' You can't expect the young girls of the present to act as we did when I was young. Girls all feel alike when they get around 20, and a century makes a difference only in the way we show our feelings" in the article "WOMAN, NEARING 100, DEFENDS THE 'FLAPPER': Danced, Too, in Her Youth, Says Mrs. Mary Schultz—Birthday Party Tomorrow" *New York Times*, 14 March 1925; Special to the *New York Times*, "FLAPPER PUPILS DECREASE: Frowns of East Orange High School Officials Have Effect" *The New York Times,* 25 September 1922.

[61] Alice Harvey, *Life Magazine Cover*, 1 May 1924.

With such an enigmatic nature, it is no wonder that a judge barred the use of the term "flapper" in his court—no one could agree upon how to define or judge her. In that particular court case, the word "flapper" was substituted by the defense for the term "frivolous."[62] This is a poor choice of synonym, as the significance of THE FLAPPER far exceeds frivolity. Identifying as a flapper was not just a way to look or even a way to live, but, for some, it was the *reason* to live. In a dramatic example, a fourteen-year-old Chicagoan girl committed suicide when she was forbidden from dressing as a flapper. According to the *New York Times*:

> Other girls in her class rolled their stockings, had their hair bobbed and called themselves flappers. She wanted to be a flapper too. But her mother was an old fashioned mother, who kindly but firmly said 'No.' So the girl put a rubber hose in her mouth and turned on the gas.[63]

Zeitz in his work *Flappers* proposes a much more convincing definition of THE FLAPPER than the aforementioned attorney. He argues that THE FLAPPER is the "first thoroughly modern American."[64] In challenging tradition and tempering radicalism, the

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[62] "Magistrate Bars 'Flapper' From Court's Vocabulary," *New York Times*, 29 December 1923.

[63] Specialist to the *New York Times*, "WOULD BE FLAPPER COMMITS SUICIDE: 14-Year-Old Chicago Girl Inhales Gas When Mother Bars Styles of Classmates," *New York Times*, 4 June 1923.

[64] Zeitz concludes: "[Lauren] Knox's eulogy for the American individual, though surely an over-statement, is as important today as in the 1920s. Then, as now, ordinary people struggled to carve out their own identities in an increasingly impersonal, prefabricated world. Millions of flappers embraced a controversial lifestyle in a spirited attempt at self-definition. But they did so in concert, buying the same brands of clothing, makeup, and cigarettes, emulating Clara Bow and Colleen Moore, and adopting the same jargon ripped from the pages of Scott Fitzgerald's latest short story. Eighty years later, their great-granddaughters struggle with the same dilemma. The flapper was, in effect, the first thoroughly modern American." Joshua Zeitz, *Flappers: A Madcap Story of Sex,*

flapper confronted the uncharted waters of modernity. The symbiotic relationship between her materialism and her abstraction is thematic of the modern era as a whole, which is unable—regardless of its theoretical principles—to divorce itself from material dependence. Her fashion gave her greater mobility (which she utilized to institute her place in entertainment establishments and the workforce), allowed her to express her sexuality, and made her a vital component in the consumer economy—thus, through her materialism she was modern.

How THE FLAPPER capitalized on technology was modern—dubbing THE FLAPPER the "Patron Saint of Chemistry," Dr. E. F. Armstrong (managing director the British Association of Chemists) told the association:

> She has rings on her fingers and synthetic stones and footwear made of artificial skins all wrought by chemists. The materials of her underwear form one of the greatest achievements of chemistry. The very sheen of her hair is perhaps synthetic, and on her face are lingerings of perhaps the British Dyestuffs Corporation. Almost everything she wears, even to bracelets and bangles, is the work of the chemist.[65]

The answer to "Who is THE 'FLAPPER'?" is: the first modern woman. There was even a movement spearheaded by the Camp-Fire Girls and supported by Colleen Moore, to officially change the term "flapper" to "modern."[66] THE FLAPPER serves as the

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*Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 290-291.

[65] Special Correspondence of *The New York Times*, "FLAPPER GETS NEW TITLE—She is Called the Patron Saint of Chemistry at a London Dinner," *The New York Times*, 11 December 1927.

[66] "Want Flapper Called 'Modern'; Camp-Fire Girls War on Term" *The New York Times,* 6 October 1925.

transitional feminist figure from the Victorian to the Modern Era. Instead of reacting against modernity, THE FLAPPER embraced both its progressive and detrimental aspects. While Gilman could not recognize the significance of this female figure, Pulitzer prize-winning author of *So Big* (1924), Edna Ferber *almost* could. She told reporter R. Heylbut Wollstein, "That's why it's a bit unsatisfactory to look at the girl of today too closely. She doesn't seem enormously vital to me because she's very obviously in a state of transition. It takes too long to find out what she's really doing."[67] Thus, she states the very reason she cannot see the vitality of THE FLAPPER: she is too close, historically, to see past the cheap glamour. She saw THE FLAPPER as one strain of two types of girls that would merge into the "real, vital, interesting, worthwhile representative twentieth century woman." The first type is "the hip-flask flapper who…[is] simply the result of the hectic, cataclysmic wartime years." The second is "the serious-minded, clear-thinking, analytical young woman, college bred, often university trained as well, who's trying to stand up straight on her won two feet." Though Ferber differentiates between the two, after examining THE FLAPPER in detail, it is clear that these two types are one in the same—that THE FLAPPER already composed the party-girl and the college girl. It was precisely this combination—a claim to life's responsibilities and life's pleasures—that made THE FLAPPER modern.

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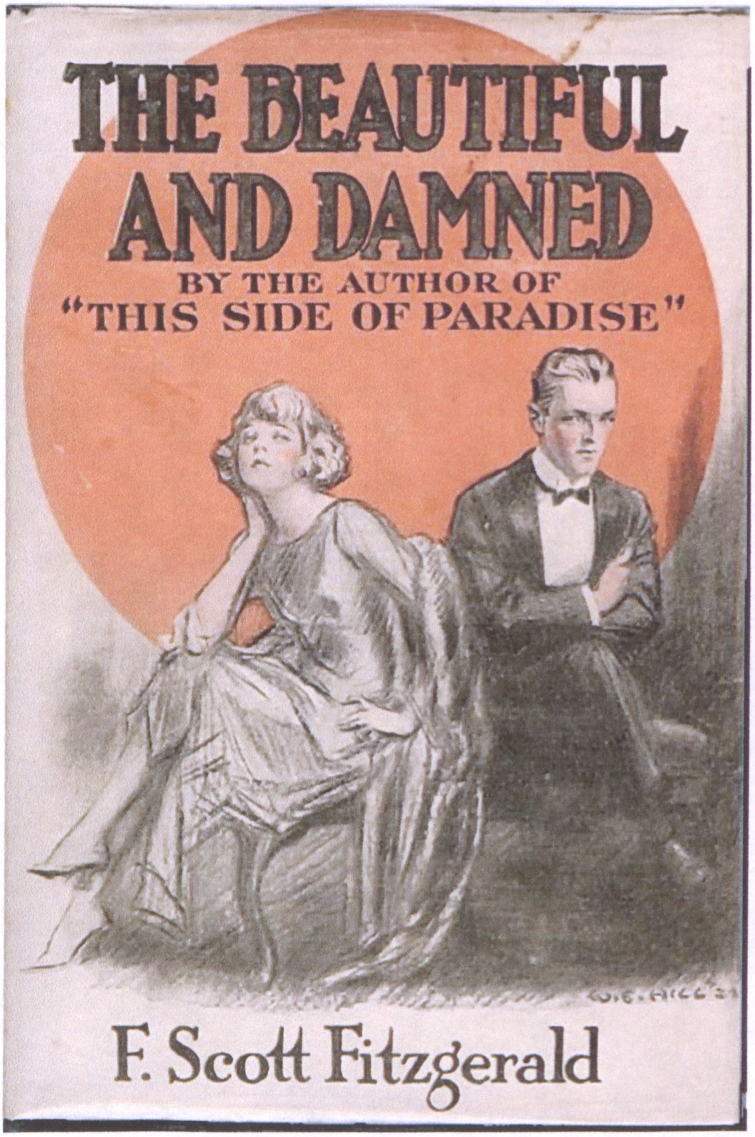
[67] R. Heylbut Wollstein, "Girls—Seen by Edna Ferber" *The New York Times*, 11 May 1924.

## WHO IS *THE* FLAPPER?

### THE AMERICAN FLAPPER: Zelda Differentiated from the Fitzgerald Heroine




It now remains to answer the question "Who was "THE FLAPPER?" This question has been answered during the life of and in historical reflection on Mrs. Zelda Sayre

Fitzgerald, the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald and also an important individual in her own right. Scott Fitzgerald was recognized by one of his critics as "the historian of his own generation, the biographer of men living in his own time."[68] However, it was not the "men" that he wrote about but the *women* that are the most significant. Despite Fitzgerald's original intentions to center his semiautobiographical second novel, *The Beautiful and Damned* (an adaptation of the Fitzgeralds' courtship, honeymoon, and early marriage and a haunting premonition of the disastrous ending to their marriage), on Anthony Patch, Gloria commandeers the novel from the moment of her introduction.[69] Gloria is the incarnation of "Beauty" in *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), attracting the attention of her readers and critics in the same way that she captivates each man she meets. However, while the men she encounters are spellbound, the reader and the critic were able to recognize her for what she was: a strong, but ultimately childish, self-absorbed, and tragic figure that cannot survive in the world she created for herself.

Her simplistic and shallow character does not necessitate triviality or insignificance—while she may worry about having the most stylish coat of the season, she should still be taken seriously as a character. Her character foreshadows the fate of her prototype, Zelda, who, interestingly, maintains the superficial image of the character in her criticism of the book. In her first published work, this criticism of *The Beautiful*

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[68] Harry Hansen, "The Beautiful and Damned" Chicago Daily News, 15 March 1922, reprinted *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception (*New York: Ben Franklin & Co. 1978), 92.

[69] For a letter discussing Fitzgerald's early conceptions for *The Beautiful and Damned*, see his letter to his publisher, Charles Scribner II, 12 August 1920, *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Life in Letters,* ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1994), 41.

*and Damned,* Zelda wrote: "I think the heroine is most amusing."[70] She may not have seemed to take either the novel or Gloria seriously, but neither Zelda nor Gloria should be dismissed with such a coy flourish. These women, with their vanities, were operating within the cultural pretexts of the flapper ideology and are therefore complicated individuals.

On the original jacket of *The Beautiful and Damned*, a portrait of the Fitzgeralds represented the novel's characters.[71] Scott, in a letter to his editor, recognized the likeness: "The girl is excellent of course—it looks somewhat like Zelda but the man, I suspect, is a sort of debauched edition of me…"[72]

It is hardly perceptive to observe that Zelda was the heroine of Scott's novels (with the notable exemption of *The Last Tycoon*).[73] Scott lifted phrases for his prose from Zelda's diary, a fact that was not hidden—in Zelda's critique she teases:

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[70] Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, "Friend Husband's Latest" New York Tribune, 2 April 1922, reprinted *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception (*New York: Ben Franklin & Co. 1978), 111.

[71] W.E Hill, *Dust Jacket for* The Beautiful and the Damned, 1922.

[72] Arthur Mizener, *Scott Fitzgerald and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 60.

[73] In Zelda's assessment of *The Last Tycoon* (as written to Edmund Wilson and Mrs. Turnball), Milford writes, "She did not like the heroine, and in the same letter to Wilson she told him Kathleen was 'undesirable: the sort of person who knows how to turn the ice-man's advances to profitable account.' A week later she wrote Mrs. Turnbull in the same vein except that her jealousy of the heroine was more transparent. She may not have known of the specific existence of Sheilah Graham before Scott's death, but she certainly sensed and resented the intrusion of another feminine model in Fitzgerald's prose: 'I confess that I don't like the heroine, she seems the sort of person who knows too well how to capitalize the unwelcome advances of the ice-man and who smells a little of the rubber-shields in her dress. However, I see how Stahr might have found her redolent of the intimacies of forgotten homely glamours, and his imagination have endowed her with the magical properties of his early authorities.'" Nancy Milford, *Zelda*, 353.

> It seems to me that on one page I recognized a portion of an old diary of mine which mysteriously disappeared shortly after my marriage, and also scraps of letters which, though considerably edited, sound to me vaguely familiar. In fact, Mr. Fitzgerald—I believe that is how he spells his name—seems to believe that plagiarism begins at home.[74]

In the comparison of the following passages (the first from one of Zelda's letters to Scott and the second from *Tender is the Night*) Milford demonstrates exactly how intimately Zelda's and Scott's flapper's thoughts were intertwined:

> I could not walk in the streets unless I had been to my lesson. I could not manage the apartment because I could not speak to the servants…and still I did not understand what I was doing…you have given me a flower and said it was "plus petit et moins entendue." We were friends. Then you took it away and I grew sicker and there was nobody to teach me.
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> Last year or whenever it was in Chicago when I got so I couldn't speak to servants or walk in the street I kept waiting for someone to tell me. It was the duty of someone who understood. The blind must be led. Only no one would tell me everything—they would just tell me half and I was already too muddled to put two and two together. One man was nice—he was a French officer and he understood. He gave me a flower and said it was "plus petite et moins entendue." We were friends. Then he took it away. I grew sicker and there was no one to explain to me.[75]

Scott directly cited Zelda as one of the four major influences on his writing. To Edmund Wilson, who was writing a critical essay on Scott, he added to the list (which already included the Midwest, Irishness, and liquor) Zelda: "…the most enormous

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[74] Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, "Friend Husband's Latest" *New York Tribune,* 2 April 1922, reprinted *F. Scott Fitzgerald: The Critical Reception (*New York: Ben Franklin & Co. 1978), 111.

[75] Milford, *Zelda*, 285.

influence upon me in the four and a half years since I met her has been the complete, fine and full-hearted selfishness and chill-mindedness of Zelda."[76] Simply put, Scott said in an interview: "Indeed, I married the heroine of my stories."[77]

However, Zelda was not quite the way Scott depicted her—what he might not have recognized was that his version of Zelda THE FLAPPER was "debauched" as well. In recognizing only the image of himself as "debauched," Scott failed to notice an interpretive aspect to Zelda's image.

Zelda was not a fictional character, and while her biographers and contemporaries may have relied heavily on her association with the Fitzgerald heroine, it is extremely biased to only analyze the life of this woman through the lens of someone else (a fiction writer and her husband, no less). In her otherwise perceptive work *Anything Goes: A Biography of the Roaring Twenties*, Lucy Moore writes, "'I can't be bothered resisting things I want,' declared Zelda as Gloria Patch"—an unfair assumption of Scott's ideas as Zelda's own philosophy.[78] Milford recognizes in Zelda's review of *The Beautiful and Damned* a personal defense against Scott's portrayal of her:

> It becomes evident in the review that Zelda was defending that part of herself within the portrait of Gloria. Zelda had been wounded by the characterization, but she did not express that directly and instead tried to cover herself by flippancy—as in the opening of the review. Gloria, it

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[76] Milford qtd. Scott, *Zelda,* 89.

[77] Frederick James Smith, "Fitzgerald, Flappers, and Fame", *Shadowland*, 3 (January 1921): 39, 75 reprinted *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 7.

[78] Lucy Moore, *Anything Goes*: *A Biography of the Roaring Twenties* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2010), 78.

> would seem, though not entirely Zelda, was representative of something Zelda felt it necessary to stand up for.[79]

Zelda also stood up for THE FLAPPER in another published article, "Eulogy on the Flapper." This article is extremely important in understanding Zelda's take on the movement that she was leading. As a flapper, Zelda's words—not Scott's—have primary significance. As Scott said, "I had no idea of originating an American flapper when I first began to write. I simply took girls whom I knew very well and, because they interested me as unique human beings, I used them for my heroines."[80] For Zelda, THE FLAPPER was more than an interesting phenomenon. Her remarks on THE FLAPPER are more than observational—they are an expression of identity and integral hints to understanding THE FLAPPER myth.

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[79] Milford, *Zelda*, 90.

[80] B.F. Wilson, "F. Scott Fitzgerald Says: 'All Women Over Thirty-five Should be Murdered,'" *Metropolitan Magazine* 58 (November 1923): 34, 75-76, reprinted *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 57.

**THE REAL FITZGERALD FLAPPER: Zelda's "Honorable Order"**

So who, then, was THE FLAPPER to Zelda? In what she claimed to have been her first interview, Zelda says: "Yes. I love Scott's books and heroines. I like the ones that are like me! That's why I love Rosalind in *This Side of Paradise*…I like their courage, their recklessness and spendthriftness. Rosalind was the original American flapper."[81]

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[81] "What a 'Flapper Novelist' Thinks of His Wife" *The Courier-Journal [Louisville]* (30 September 1923), 112, reprinted *Conversations with F. Scott Fitzgerald*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 47.

She admired THE FLAPPER and recognized her own connection to the movement. She also differentiated between the substantive and the fashionable: "Three or four years ago girls of her type were pioneers. They did what they wanted to, were unconventional, perhaps, just because they wanted to for self-expression. Now they do it because it's the thing everyone does."[82] In that interview, Zelda allowed Scott to assume a prominent role, calling him in from his study to orchestrate her interview in the same way he filtered her words in his novels. She seemed to cheerfully submit to his direction, but there was more to Zelda than being "the most charming person in the world."[83] Her later excessive and wild attempt to become a prima ballerina at 27 years of age and, even predating that, a possible affair with a French aviation pilot, demonstrate that she was much more independent than the persona she conveyed to the press and through Scott's novels.

The Fitzgerald heroine as Scott understood her was not a workable model for Zelda. As Milford pointed out, Zelda did not completely agree with Scott's portrayal of THE FLAPPER. *Perhaps* Zelda did not have a clear conception of who THE FLAPPER was. Critics of her short stories note her lack of character development. Her heroines are more characterized by appearances than by their personalities, as Zelda was certainly preoccupied by beauty. However, this infatuation with superficiality has already been a noted attribute of the flapper movement with deeper consequences. Unlike Ferber and Gilman, Zelda does not reveal a preoccupation with progression and transition in her

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ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 47.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

article. She seems less concerned with the future than with the present—again, lacking the farsightedness for character development but nonetheless providing an astute observation of the present moment. Zelda may not have been highly educated (in this, she falls slightly short of the collegiate flapper stereotype) but she *did* demonstrate clarity on the identity of THE FLAPPER and perception of her cultural role in her "Eulogy on the Flapper."[84]

In this work, written for *Metropolitan Magazine* (1922), Zelda laments the "passing" of the Flapper, a figure she finds refreshing and natural:

> She flirted because it was fun to flirt and wore a one-piece bathing suit because she had a good figure; she covered her face with powder because she didn't need it and refused to be bored chiefly because she wasn't boring. She was conscious that the things she did were the things she had always wanted to do.[85]

For Zelda, THE FLAPPER's self-expression was important in exactly the same way that this paper views THE FLAPPER's importance: as a progressive feminist who brought about real and important gender changes in the 1920s, specifically. Zelda also makes the important distinction between being progressive and obnoxious:

> And the new Flappers galumping along in unfastened galoshes are striving not to do what is pleasant and what they please, but simply to outdo the founders of the Honorable Order of Flappers: to outdo *everything*. Flapperdom has become a game, it is no longer a philosophy.[86]

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[84] Zelda lacked *formal* education. She had direct access to the person who was arguably her generation's best writer—she was not without guidance.

[85] Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, "Eulogy on the Flapper," *Metropolitan Magazine* (June 1922) reprinted in *Zelda Fitzgerald—The collected Writings*, ed. Matthew J. Brucolli, (New York: Scribner, 1991), 391.

[86] Ibid.

In the loss of higher purpose, Zelda mourned the loss of the Flapper herself. Thus, in this important article, THE FLAPPER provides the reader with the evidence that she viewed her lifestyle as more than consisting of a string of wild parties. Zelda lived according to a "philosophy" that was "Honorable," grounded, and practical:

> [Disillusionment's] effects on the Flappers I have known simply been to crystallize their ambitious desires and give form to their code of living so that they *can* come home and live happily ever afterwards—or go into the movies or become social service "workers" or something…[Flapperdom] is making [the youth of the country] intelligent and teaching them to capitalize their natural resources and get their money's worth. They are merely applying business methods to being young.[87]

Zelda's flapper philosophy therefore differs substantially from Scott's. The Scott Fitzgerald flapper tended to be more trouble than she was worth—in his most important work, *The Great Gatsby* (1925), every major female character (Daisy Buchannan, Jordan Baker, and Myrtle Wilson) negatively impacted the men around them and each served as a vehicle of destruction. Though Zelda's biography indicates that THE FLAPPER could bring about ruin, the Zelda Fitzgerald flapper is remarkably stable in her rationality.

Zelda's Flapper is traditional as well: "And I should think that fully airing the desire for unadulterated gaiety, for romances that she knows will not last, and for dramatizing herself would make her more inclined to favor the 'back to the fireside' movement."[88] The Zelda Fitzgerald Flapper has fun while she is young and then settles

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[87] Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, "Eulogy on the Flapper," *Metropolitan Magazine* (June 1922) reprinted in *Zelda Fitzgerald—The collected Writings*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli, (New York: Scribner, 1991), 392-393.

[88] Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, "Eulogy on the Flapper," 392.

down for her "happily ever-after" that is more applicable to old age.[89] She rejects repression because it is unnatural and rejects the "deathbed air either of snatching-the-last-moment" and "martyr-resignation" of most women because it is impractical.[90] According to Zelda, THE FLAPPER wants to enjoy life and be remembered for her "accomplishments" and not for her "Flapping."[91]

According to Milford:

> At twenty-one, Zelda had formulated a sort of philosophy of life; it was remarkably like Gloria's. It was an application of business acumen to femininity: you created yourself as a product and you showed yourself with all the flair of a good advertising campaign. Women were to dramatize themselves in their youth, to experiment and be gay; in their old age (in their forties) they would be magically content. What Zelda intended to avoid at all costs was her vision of the legion of unhappy women, saddled with domesticity, weary and yet resigned to it. She was perceptive enough to understand that in their apparent resignation they thought of themselves as martyrs, and that was a position she abhorred for its dishonesty. What she wrote was a protest, but it was also a defense of her own code of existence. That this code was potentially destructive and that it would demand its own continual and wearying performance she did not take into account.[92]

This propensity toward ruin, however, needs to be somewhat modified. In assuming one's own destiny, one assumes responsibility for personal successes and failures. That one can fail does not mean that one necessarily *must* fail; in exactly the same way, that THE FLAPPER *could* ruin herself does not mean that she necessarily *must*

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, "Eulogy on the Flapper," 391.

[92] Milford, *Zelda*, 92.

ruin herself. Zelda's breakdown and death have been interpreted, often, as the predictable outcome of her life's choices: "...as the story of the most famous of all flappers, Zelda Fitzgerald, would show, incineration, not just excitement, remained as the price that might have to be paid...Love as a risk, not as security, marriage as exposure, not as comfort, had begun to be sensed as a promise in American life."[93] But what about THE FLAPPER *necessitated* ruin? She went to the movies, she wore sensible clothes and shoes, she got an education, she was prepared to take care of herself if she must, she asserted herself in her relationships, she swore, she wore makeup, she drank, she exercised, she enjoyed herself—she broke down barriers so that the only thing that distinguished her from a man was the fact that she was a women.

Thus, the only thing that could *necessitate* ruin, then, would be her female assertion in a male sphere—unless *all* modern Americans were destined for destruction. As twenty-first century Americans, we cannot possibly claim that the absolute consequence of modernity is failure. We also cannot contradict the evidence against asserting that all women who operate outside the home and participate in forms of public entertainment necessarily must die in mental asylum fires. Rather, we can agree that modern individuals, regardless of gender, are all faced with the possibility of failure. Zelda only failed because she tried. Zelda failed as a ballerina; she was unsuccessful as a writer; she made a poor mother; she died in a mental institution—but only because she was given the opportunity to have a hobby, to compete with her husband at his trade, to choose whether or not to be a mother, and to be responsible for her own actions and

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[93] Meyer, *Sex and Power*, 348.

separate from her husband. Zelda was conscious of her own independence and its inherent responsibility:

> Alabama lay thinking in room number twenty-one-o-nine of the Biltmore Hotel that her life would be different with her parents so far away. David David Knight Knight Knight, for instance, couldn't possibly make her put out her light till she got good and ready. No power on earth could make her do anything, she thought frightened, anymore, except herself. [94]

When Zelda acted autonomously (though belatedly) she fully accepted the flapper mantle: as an independent woman, Zelda was *necessarily* destined to fail *or* succeed. The extremity of her failure correlates to the radical gender statement she was making—it is as remarkable as if she had succeeded. This real independence is what the Fitzgerald heroine lacked. Zelda was truly THE FLAPPER—not Rosalind, Gloria, Daisy, Nicole, nor Kathleen.

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[94] Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz* (1932), reprinted in *Zelda Fitzgerald—The collected Writings*, ed. Matthew J. Brucolli, (New York: Scribner, 1991), 44.

## IN CONCLUSION

Just as the Fitzgerald heroine fell out of literary fashion, so too THE FLAPPER fell out of vogue. When the 1920s had passed, the Fitzgeralds likewise decreased in popularity—the Jazz Age was over, and the icons from that era were replaced with new icons that better represented current thought.[95] Zelda had a series of mental breakdowns and was diagnosed with schizophrenia and Scott drank himself into Hollywood screen play-writing mediocrity. After Scott fell from the public spotlight, the once adoring public turned apathetic to Zelda as well.

Both Fitzgeralds had small funerals. Scott died first, and almost immediately following his death there was a revival of interest in him. Edmund Wilson, after studying Scott's notes for *The Last Tycoon*, acknowledged him as the best of his generation—likewise, Stephen Vincent Benét wrote in his review of *Tycoon*: "...the evidence is in. You can take off your hats now, gentlemen, and I think perhaps you had better. This is not a legend, this is a reputation—and, seen in perspective, it may well be one of the most secure reputations of our time."[96] A few university students in the new generation sought out Zelda in Alabama to hear about her husband.

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[95] *Time Magazine* wrote of Zelda following her painting exhibition "There was a time when Mrs. Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald was a more fabulous character than her novel-writing husband. That was when she was Zelda Sayre..."—in other words, Zelda's heyday had come and passed. Qtd in Milford, *Zelda,* 291.

[96] Milford, *Zelda*, 352.

Zelda's death was also tragic: trapped on the top floor during a fire in the Highland Mental Hospital, Zelda's charred body was recognizable only by a slipper trapped under it. Regarding her death, Zelda is once again linked to a literary figure, this time by her own doing:

> As a girl, Zelda had identified with the heroine of Owen Johnson's best-selling novel and movie of the 1910s, *The Salamander*, its title taken from the lizard thought in classical times to be able to pass untouched through fire: "I am in the world to do something unusual, extraordinary. I'm not like every other little woman." Looking back on her life, Zelda sadly acknowledged that her "story is the fault of nobody but me. I believed I was a Salamander and it seems I am nothing but an impediment." In 1948 a fire razed her sanatorium to the ground and she died in the blaze—no salamander, after all. She was forty-eight years old.[97]

However, her death should not define Zelda. She was not a purposeless, tragic figure. In her 48 years, she lived a remarkably vivacious existence. She was the icon of her generation. She was the inspiration of F. Scott Fitzgerald and a celebrity in her own right, with a large body of work (in many genres) to her credit. Her assertion of independence was revolutionary—her lifestyle distinctly modern. THE FLAPPER's influence on society could not be so easily forgotten; her impression is felt today.

Historians still look to Zelda as the representative of her era. The drama of her biography allows for interpretation particularly suited to the aforementioned principles of flapperism: a look that complements her subversive gender statement, dependence on materialism as a means to assert independence (which necessitated a consumer appetite and business acumen), an acknowledged female sexuality and the utilization of that

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[97] Moore, *Anything Goes*, 83-84.

sexuality in a reconstitution of the dating system, an assumption of male virtues and vices (paramount of which is the right to pursuit of happiness), a physical mobility inherently tied to fashion but with broader social implications, and a declaration of self as she understood herself in the context of the 1920s as one of the "Honorable Order of Flappers."

As Zelda wrote in *Save Me the Waltz*, "Once [Alabama's father] had said, 'If you want to choose, you must be a goddess.' That was when she had wanted her own way about things. It wasn't easy to be a goddess away from Olympus."[98] Flappers wanted to choose, so they literally bought and actively perpetuated a myth about themselves that gave them their goddess-like aura. However, THE FLAPPER should only be "mythological" when interpreted within her era. Retrospectively, the historical significance of THE FLAPPER as a type and THE FLAPPER as an individual should be appreciated for its real impact on modern society.

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[98] Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald, *Save Me the Waltz*, 189.

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